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Articles in Today's Clips Monday, December 10, 2007

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Chapter 7: Suspects and lies

December 8, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Seventh of 14 parts

Within two days of Ricky Holland's disappearance, police had a promising suspect.

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He was a 52-year-old convicted sex offender who rented a room inside his friends' apartment on Grand River, about 4 miles west of the Hollands'. Williamston police had received several calls in 2005 complaining that the man followed children on a bike, exposed himself and masturbated in public.

Police took him in for questioning on Monday, July 4. He admitted following Ricky's case, but denied having anything to do with the boy. A search of his room turned up stuffed animals, handcuffs, snapshots of children and a folder containing newspaper articles about missing kids.

He'd been convicted several times of public indecency and was a suspect in at least two molestation incidents, but he'd never been convicted of a sex-related felony. He agreed to take a polygraph, and the test showed deception.

Police put the man under surveillance and began checking his story, questioning people who knew him and tracing his movements. By the weekend, though, they were pretty sure he had nothing to do with Ricky's disappearance.

A boy on video: He's not Ricky

Pressure to find the boy was intensifying. The disappearance received front-page coverage in the Lansing State Journal and led off local television newscasts. Hundreds of volunteers, plus police, firefighters and military personnel, searched in 100-degree heat.

On Wednesday, Ingham County Sheriff's Capt. Rick Miller went to a McDonald's in Perry to check a new lead: The store's security video showed a small boy, alone, buying food. Miller asked Chief Deputy Vicki Harrison to bring the Hollands to the restaurant to see the video.

Lisa agreed to go, but Tim begged off, saying the other kids would "throw fits" if both of them were gone. Harrison said the atmosphere in the car was unexpectedly lighthearted. At M-52 and Haslett Road, Harrison pointed out where a searcher found a wrapper from a fruit snack -- possibly Ricky's. Lisa barely reacted. Later, she didn't even bother to call Tim to let him know, after she stood on a chair at the restaurant to view the video on an overhead monitor, that she was certain the boy wasn't Ricky.

A few hours later, Lisa brought her mother to the police command center on Grand River, near the Hollands' home. Betty Taylor, wearing an oxygen line, was weeping and gasping for breath. Harrison patted her arm and told her to relax before asking her to talk about Ricky.

Calling him her "sunshine boy," Taylor broke down sobbing, saying how worried she was. Police had taken a toothbrush Ricky used from her house -- did that mean they thought he was dead? Harrison assured Taylor that police

didn't think Ricky was dead, but Harrison was struck by how calm and collected Lisa was in contrast to her mother.

New complaint fails to check out

Despite Ricky's strange forays into neighbors' homes and Tim's unusual explanations about his son's behavior, no one called Child Protective Services until July 7 -- almost a week after Ricky was reported missing.

The caller, a neighbor, said Ricky had gone out his bedroom window before his disappearance and entered homes to look for food. The Hollands had lived in the house for nearly three months, yet no one recalled having seen the five kids playing outside.

The complaint came at a bad time for the Hollands on two fronts: Ricky was gone and they were in the midst of trying to adopt his 19-month-old half-brother, Brett.

The next day, CPS investigator Kyron Harvell was asked to check out the complaint and coordinate with law enforcement.

Harvell requested CPS records from Jackson County and talked with Ricky's Department of Human Services foster care worker from the county, Theresa Bronsberg. She told him Ricky had a history of running away but she never suspected the Hollands of mistreating the kids. Harvell met with the Hollands and heard virtually the same story about Ricky's disappearance as police did. He saw nothing unusual about the other children, who appeared healthy and well cared for.

Detectives shift focus to Hollands

With suspicions mounting, top officials with the sheriff's department, deputies working the case, representatives of the Ingham County Prosecutor's Office and State Police met to form a task force on the morning of July 11.

They talked about the Hollands' lack of emotion and their suspicious behavior. They reviewed the tips they'd received and discussed the questioning of sex offenders. But it was clear by the end of the meeting that the prime suspects had become Ricky's parents.

Sheriff's Sgt. Roy Holliday, the lead investigator, asked two other detectives to head to the Hollands' for a more thorough search. They got there about 11 a.m. and found a truck from a company called BioClean Team parked outside.

Within minutes, the detectives were called to the mobile command center, around the corner on Grand River, where BioClean president Kameron Bradman was telling police the Hollands had hired his firm to clean up fingerprint dust.

But Bradman wanted police to know that he'd seen what looked like blood spatters on a baseboard in the hall outside the bedroom. And inside Ricky's closet, to one side, workers had found wadded-up clothing -- a boy's socks and a T-shirt that appeared to be bloodstained.

One of the workers had asked Tim about the clothing and was told: "Don't worry about those; the police already know about that. It's not a big deal." The worker put the clothing in a plastic bag and left it in the room.

When the two detectives returned to the house, Tim signed a form allowing them to search. They found the plastic bag with the socks and long-sleeve gray cotton T-shirt with the inscription: "Be kind to your sister, one day you may need her for an alibi."

The detectives took photographs and swabs of the baseboard spots and confiscated the clothing as evidence.

Tim explained a possible cause for the blood -- Ricky was prone to nosebleeds -- but said his wife would know more. Lisa told them Ricky had a nosebleed a couple of days before running away. She hadn't washed or moved the clothing because she'd been told by police not to touch anything. She also said the blood on the baseboard could have come

from a nosebleed.

Later that day, BioClean workers removed the carpeting in Ricky's bedroom because the fingerprint dust wouldn't come out. A more thorough search by State Police crime scene technicians wouldn't take place for nearly two months. A sheriff's department official later said police didn't have enough evidence, pending forensic tests, to obtain a warrant for a more thorough search at this point. It took weeks to confirm that the blood on the T-shirt was Ricky's; the baseboard blood was not. A forensic expert later could not rule out that the T-shirt blood might have come from a nosebleed.

Tim Holland caught in lie

Melissa Sewell, Brett's adoption worker at Jackson County DHS, called Child Protective Services on July 13 to say Brett's adoption couldn't go through unless the Hollands were cleared in the investigation of the July 7 complaint from the neighbor. Sewell vouched for the Hollands, saying she'd worked with the family for years.

The next day, Harvell sent Sewell a letter: "A thorough investigation has been conducted with this family and there is not a preponderance of evidence that child abuse or neglect has occurred in this case."

His final report noted that the Hollands seemed to be bonded to Ricky and were emotionally torn about his disappearance. "This worker has no concerns regarding the safety of the other children," he wrote.

Brett's adoption could proceed.

At a July 21 hearing that Tim and Lisa did not attend, a Jackson County Family Court judge signed the adoption order. Detectives on the task force were appalled when they learned about it days later. Several questioned whether the DHS knew what it was doing.

A day after the adoption, State Police obtained a search warrant for the Hollands' cell and home phone records. The affidavit supporting the warrant noted that Tim claimed to have seen the 52-year-old sex offender -- the onetime suspect -- outside a McDonald's in Williamston in early April.

But police knew the man hadn't moved to the area until early May.

Tim had to be lying. What else was he lying about?

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

SUNDAY: A stubborn window screen.

[Chapter 6: Ricky's gone!](#)

[Chapter 8: A sticking window >>](#)

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COULD YOU HAVE SAVED RICKY HOLLAND?

Chapter 8: A sticking window

Detectives turn up heat on Hollands and make a crucial discovery: The window Ricky supposedly used needs a man's strength to budge

December 9, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Eighth of 14 parts

Tim and Lisa Holland were assuring their families, neighbors and Tim's coworkers that they weren't suspects in their son's disappearance because they'd passed lie detector tests. Trouble was, the State Police lieutenant in charge of the polygraph unit had gone back over Tim's test and reached a different conclusion.

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Lt. Shawn Loughrige called Ingham County Sheriff's Detective Sgt. Roy Holliday on Aug. 5, 2005, to say there were signs Tim had fooled the examiner. His staff hadn't known when it gave the test that Tim had a lot of experience taking polygraphs as part of his Army intelligence work.

Loughrige wanted to know more about the case and asked Holliday to drive him around locations connected to Ricky's disappearance. The two met in Williamston the same day, and Holliday drove slowly past the Hollands' home on Douglas, a dead-end street off Grand River just outside town.

At the end of the street, Holliday turned the unmarked car around and parked it half on the grass, north of the house. The officers sat and talked about the similarities between the written statements the Hollands had made about the night before Ricky disappeared. They were supposed to write them out at home in longhand without consulting one another. But Tim's was typed, and Loughrige believed they had coordinated their statements.

As the detectives talked, they saw Tim back his car out of the driveway and come toward them. He made a U-turn and parked behind them, got out and made a wide approach as he asked in a quavering voice, "Is it OK if I go by here?"

"Why wouldn't it be OK for you to go by us on a public street?" Holliday said.

Struggling, Tim said, "I guess ... I don't... I ... It ... OK!"

He turned to leave but stopped when Holliday motioned him to come closer.

'His hands were shaking'

How did Tim know the police car was there? Holliday asked.

Tim said he'd seen them drive slowly by the house and not return. He figured he'd better check it out. Did he think it was suspicious? Holliday asked. Tim said he and Lisa became concerned after Lisa stepped outside with binoculars and saw two people sitting in the parked car.

Tim's arms were resting on the open window and his "hands were shaking as he talked to me," Holliday said. Within five minutes, Holliday saw beads of sweat on Tim's forehead and the front of his shirt was soaking wet.

Holliday introduced Loughrige, who told Tim he'd been reading over their statements and wanted Tim to redo his, this time in longhand and without consulting his wife. Tim agreed. Then Holliday asked if Tim would show Loughrige around the house, and they followed him down the block.

Loughrige wanted to see Ricky's bedroom and was shown to the door, which was latched from the outside. Inside, the detectives saw that everything of Ricky's -- clothing, toys, bedding -- was gone.

Tim said BioClean Team, the company hired to clean up after the police search, had taken the clothing and bedding. Tim knew that was untrue; BioClean took only the carpeting from Ricky's room. Holliday said he couldn't believe the company would do that, especially clean items. Loughrige thought Tim was caught off guard and tried to change the subject by showing the detectives the window. When Holliday tried to slide open the screen and couldn't, he asked Tim to do it.

Using substantial effort, Tim edged the screen open. Loughrige told Tim he was amazed that a 7-year-old could open it by himself and asked whether Ricky could have used a tool to pry it. Tim nervously replied that he didn't know. The detectives saw nothing to indicate the screen had been pried.

Holliday also noticed that the carpeting smelled new. Tim said BioClean had recommended replacing it, though it was only a few months old.

Out the window? It isn't easy

As they walked around the house, the detectives asked Tim about his civilian intelligence job with the Army. He revealed that he'd been trained in an interrogation technique widely used by police and that he'd taken many polygraphs.

Holliday asked Tim what he thought happened to Ricky.

"Tim Holland looked down at the floor, hesitated for a few seconds and then replied, 'I don't know; I'm not an expert,' " Holliday said.

"Yes, you are," Loughrige said.

Tim didn't answer and Holliday thought he looked shaken. Then Tim said, "I guess Ricky was probably abducted after he ran away and taken somewhere out of the area."

As the detectives were leaving, Loughrige told Tim he wanted to check one more thing in Ricky's room. He tried the screen again. It was just as hard to slide open. He turned to Tim and said, "It really is hard to believe that Ricky could have opened this screen window on his own, don't you think?"

Tim said nothing.

Strange, Holliday thought as he and Loughrige left. Neither Tim nor Lisa ever asked whether there were any new leads in their son's disappearance.

Dog's grave yields no clues

The phalanx of police and Michigan State University forensic anthropologists arrived at the Hollands' on Aug. 12, 2005, to dig up a dog's grave in the search for clues. Tim and Lisa were away in suburban Detroit, hiring a criminal defense lawyer. Tim had taken a second polygraph the day before, and the results hadn't ruled him out as a suspect.

The affidavit authorizing the dig noted that Ricky's clothing was missing, the dog had been euthanized about two weeks

after Ricky's disappearance and Tim had refused to answer when police asked him whether anything else was buried there.

Police thought they might find Ricky's missing clothing, but nothing was there but the animal's bones. Police reburied them in the same spot.

Detectives resumed knocking on the doors of people who knew the Hollands.

Neighbor Mike Freeman, then the principal of Williamston High School, said the only time he'd seen Ricky, the boy was shockingly skinny and in need of a haircut.

"The kid didn't look like he had hardly any muscles on his body at all, looked like a stiff wind would blow him right over," Freeman told detectives.

Tim's nephew Rodney Weston said he thought the way Ricky's disappearance was discovered -- with Tim talking to his mother on the phone -- seemed staged. But Weston also said he didn't believe Tim would hurt Ricky, nor could he imagine that Lisa -- whom he never liked -- would harm the boy. If Lisa had anything to do with Ricky's death, Weston said, "she would not be smart enough to dispose of Ricky's body on her own."

A lawyer warns off detectives

On Aug. 15, the Hollands' new lawyer, Neil Rockind, sent a letter to Holliday that cut off direct communication with his clients.

"Both of the Hollands regret very strongly that it has come to this, but unfortunately it has," Rockind's letter said in bold italics. "They are hurting over their son's absence, which pain was only exaggerated by your digging up their yard, suspecting them of having buried evidence connected to his disappearance and unsettling a deceased, beloved family dog."

He asked for copies of all the investigative reports the detectives had so far.

The request was ignored.

MONDAY: A torn and bloody shirt.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

[Chapter 7: Suspects and lies](#)

Chapter 9: Blood on a shirt

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CHAPTER 9 COULD YOU HAVE SAVED RICKY?

A torn and bloody T-shirt

December 10, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Ninth of 14 parts

At 6:45 a.m. on Sept. 6, 2005 -- more than two months after Ricky Holland's disappearance -- task force detectives, including for the first time a State Police forensic unit, arrived at the Holland house with four search warrants: for the house, both cars, their home computer and hard drives, and DNA swabs from the whole family.

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Lisa, up with the four kids, opened the door and Sheriff's Sgt. Roy Holliday explained what was about to happen.

At one point, as Lisa and Tim got the kids ready to leave, Lisa grabbed a backpack out of a closet and carried it into the kitchen, telling Holliday it was a diaper bag and she needed to add wipes for the kids. He said he'd have to take a look.

She resisted, but finally said, "Fine, go ahead then."

Inside, Holliday found diapers and fruit snack packs. Then, from a front pocket, he pulled out a plastic bag containing what looked like a small orange T-shirt, cut into pieces, some of which looked bloodstained. Forensic scientists later confirmed the blood was Ricky's, splattered as if it had dripped from his long hair.

Lisa said she'd never seen the plastic bag before and didn't know how it got there. Holliday walked into the living room to ask Tim, who also denied knowing about it.

Few of Ricky's things remain

Holliday was struck by how the house was so devoid of signs of Ricky -- as if Tim and Lisa weren't expecting him to return, as if he had never lived there.

There were only a handful of photos of Ricky, none recent. In a cardboard box, officers found three prescription bottles for Ricky with dates from 2004, the previous year. The bottles were mostly full, suggesting that Ricky hadn't been given the medicine for months. His psychiatrist later told investigators he hadn't seen Ricky since July 2004, though he had refilled two prescriptions after a phone call from Lisa in November when he'd asked her to bring in the boy. She never did.

The investigators collected fresh samples of small blood splatters from the baseboard in the hallway outside Ricky's bedroom and new samples of blood on a family room wall between the TV and a VHS tape cabinet. Tests would later show the family room blood could have been Ricky's but not the baseboard spots.

A move to remove other 4 kids

Two weeks earlier, on Aug. 22, Holliday had called Child Protective Services to seek more information about the

Hollands' past contacts with the Department of Human Services and to try to launch an investigation to remove their four other children.

Stressing the need for secrecy, he asked CPS investigators to attend a task force meeting the next day. CPS supervisor Gail Cacciani assigned two of her best investigators, Kathleen Daugherty and Colin Parks, to the case.

The next day, they learned that detectives believed Ricky was dead and Tim and Lisa likely had killed him and hidden the body. Detectives wanted CPS to investigate possible maltreatment of the other children, but they wanted it done carefully.

They asked Daugherty and Parks to delay face-to-face contact with the Hollands until CPS got their records from the Jackson County DHS. Police and prosecutors could try to subpoena the records -- and likely face a strong legal challenge from the Hollands -- but CPS had the right to get them without a subpoena.

When she returned to her office, Daugherty met with supervisors. They agreed to hold off contacting the Hollands, a technical violation of routine procedure. During the next two weeks, Daugherty requested an array of records from the Jackson County DHS and interviewed Ricky's former foster care worker, Theresa Bronsberg, and Melissa Sewell, the children's adoption worker. They said they never suspected that any of the kids, including Ricky, were being abused.

Attorney calls it harassment ...

The Hollands' attorney had given Tim and Lisa strict instructions not to talk about Ricky or their other children. But, to complete her investigation, Daugherty had to interview them. So, on Sept. 9, with police nearby in case of trouble, she knocked on their door. Lisa was there. She wouldn't answer many questions, but Daugherty checked each of the children for signs of abuse and saw nothing. The kids appeared to be healthy, active and interacting appropriately with their mother.

At some point, attorney Neil Rockind called. He quizzed Daugherty about the source of the complaint, and when she insisted it was confidential, Rockind said he knew it came from police and called it harassment. Daugherty pressed him to let her interview the Hollands, and he told her to send him written questions and perhaps he could arrange a meeting in his office.

In the following days, Rockind didn't return several calls from CPS.

... but investigation goes on

Daugherty and Cacciani, her supervisor, went to a follow-up task force meeting Sept. 13. Holliday told them about finding blood in the hallway and family room and on the cut-up T-shirt. But the lab work hadn't come back yet, so it wasn't clear whose blood it was.

"We need to be very careful here," Holliday cautioned. Police didn't want information about the blood released. Holliday suggested that CPS canvass the Hollands' neighbors and others who knew the children for signs of abuse.

Daugherty contacted several of the family's former neighbors in Jackson, who mostly reported that the couple kept to themselves and didn't let their kids play outside. One reported seeing Lisa yelling at Ricky and yanking his arm to pull him into the car.

Daugherty also spoke with teachers and employees of the Jackson Public Schools, gathering comments similar to those made earlier to police about Lisa's and Ricky's odd behaviors -- Lisa's fights with the district over special education and restricting classroom treats and Ricky's thefts of food -- but they didn't suspect abuse. A school bus driver remembered Lisa's verbal negativity toward Ricky and his hunger and seeming reluctance to go home. From the Hollands' current neighbors outside Williamston, Daugherty learned about Ricky's strange forays into homes.

On Sept. 22, Daugherty went to Discovery Elementary School in Williamston to talk to Nancy Deal, who had Ricky's younger brother Trevor, a 3 1/2 -year-old with speech delays, in her special-education preschool class.

But Deal said she had no concerns about the boy regarding mistreatment. Trevor was always dressed cleanly, had good hygiene and attendance, and his parents were involved. Daugherty tried to speak with Trevor, with little success. Unable to even give his name, he was nearly impossible to understand.

End result: No petition filed

On Sept. 26, Daugherty and Cacciani met with law enforcement investigators again.

Daugherty pulled out a draft of a petition to ask a judge to remove the Holland children. It talked about how Ricky went to school hungry or with carrot sandwiches and wearing diapers; had rope burns or marks on his wrists, and how his mother walked him in a harness. It said Ricky was reported missing by his parents. It said nothing about forensic evidence or blood splatters.

"Give us the blood," Daugherty said. "Let us use the blood."

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings III stepped in for a moment and heard some of the discussion. He said the safety of the kids was most important but it would be up to Ingham County DHS Director Susan Hull to file a petition.

However, Mike Ferency, the assistant prosecutor on the case, insisted there could be no mention of the blood. Ricky's disappearance was gathering steam on a wider stage as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children got involved. But police had no body, no confession and no real motive for anyone wanting to harm the boy.

If a petition prompted a judge to order removal of the younger children, court documents would expose details investigators didn't want public. The criminal case could be compromised because the Hollands' attorney surely would subpoena detectives.

Prosecutors also worried what would happen if Tim and Lisa were about to lose custody of the kids. Would they flee? Harm themselves or the kids?

The petition could not be filed, prosecutors decided.

Hull later told DHS staff members investigating the case that she had been given off-the-record advice from a department official to let prosecutors make the call. She would not name the official.

TUESDAY: A surprise on the hard drive.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

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CPS workers' views are key

December 10, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The judgment of a Child Protective Services investigator is crucial to a finding that a child has been mistreated.

"It's a decision made by the worker," said Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services. "The worker investigates and weighs the facts and evidence, then makes a determination about the preponderance of evidence."

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"Preponderance of evidence" is a legal standard that means more than half the evidence suggests abuse or neglect. It's a lesser standard than the one juries use to convict someone of a crime, which is "beyond a reasonable doubt."

DHS supervisors also must sign off on all findings and reports in connection with a foster child's case, not only from CPS, but from the foster care, adoption and licensing units. All of the line workers in Ricky's case acted with the approval of supervisors.

County DHS directors have the ultimate responsibility for managing cases under their jurisdiction.

The number of confirmed maltreatment cases in Michigan rose nearly a third from 1996 to 2006, from 12,002 to 17,523.

Sorbet, who emphasized that state law prevents the DHS from discussing specifics about any case, said several factors are considered before an investigator can confirm maltreatment.

"If the child makes statements to other persons and those persons reported those statements to us," Sorbet said. "Or more specific information from the child about how the abuse or neglect happened, that could be more credible."

"If there had been a witness, like a sibling or others, who heard another one crying and reported the incident; admission of abuse by the mother or father, or a doctor who stated that the injuries were not accidental. These are all the types of things the worker would consider when making the final determination."

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Bay City Times Live

Friday, December 07, 2007

Former deputy testifies at sexual assault trial

Dale P. Van Wert told a jury on Friday that the girl who accuses him of sexually assaulting her multiple times was angry that he wouldn't allow her to go on dates.

He described the relationship with the girl, then 13, as "good and bad," and said the two had been "bumping heads."

But he denied ever touching the girl in a sexual manner.

"Absolutely not," said Van Wert, 49, in response to questions from Matthew Reyes, his lead defense attorney.

Van Wert, a former Bay County Sheriff's deputy is charged with three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and three counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct. He faces up to life in prison if convicted by the jury of 10 women and two men. He's accused of sexual assaulting the child multiple times in December 2006 and January at his Garfield Township home, where he and wife, Terri, raised six children, including five who were adopted or were being fostered for the state.

The jury began deliberating Friday around 4:45 p.m. after the third full day of testimony in the case.

In his closing arguments, Assistant Bay County Prosecutor J. Dee Brooks urged the jury to convict Van Wert on all six counts.

"Think of what it was like for this child to have to go through this," Brooks said.

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STURGIS JOURNAL

Print this story

Dealing with the grief

BY TERRY KATZ
STURGIS JOURNAL

CONSTANTINE - Zola Clark of Constantine has a painting on the wall of her home.

The painting shows a pretty blonde girl sitting alone with a puppy along a riverbank as she dangles her foot in the water.

Every time Clark, 77, walks past that framed picture, her heart twinges. She sees her great-granddaughter, Jodi Parrack, in that picture.

That was the reason Clark hung the picture in the living room several years ago — it looked like Jodi.

A month has passed since 11-year-old Jodi Parrack's body was found in the Constantine Township Cemetery on Nov. 8. Police have yet to reveal a cause of death but have ruled it a murder. And while no arrests have been made in Jodi's murder, village residents have become accustomed to seeing police, the FBI and sniffing dogs in their quiet neighborhood.

— Brave girl

Two years ago when Jodi and the family lived with Clark on Riverside Drive, she had a little dog that she cuddled, Clark said. Jodi loved taking care of babies and baby animals.

Then the family moved to an apartment across the railroad tracks on Third Street, and Clark lost contact. Jodi's new home overlooked the Constantine Township Cemetery. Valerie Jo remarried and Jodi now had a stepfather, Kevin Carver.

It wouldn't be the last time the family moved. During Jodi's lifetime, she lived in Colon, Mendon and Three Rivers. Last month, less than two weeks after her death, the family moved again to a different location in Constantine.

Jodi often spent time alone and on the streets in the village.

— She was a brave girl, Clark said. — Jodi had many friends at (Riverside) school but she liked to ride her bike. I remember the time she was riding with her older brothers when her bike broke down. The boys didn't notice she wasn't following them until they didn't see her.

On the night of Nov. 8, the Constantine police knocked on the door of the Clark house looking for Doug Parrack. Parrack was Jodi's father and Clark's grandson.



Seventy-seven year-old Zola Clark says she wishes Jodi Parrack and her family had never moved from her house on Riverside Drive in Constantine. — I know she would still be alive today, she said. Her dog, Sweet Pea, is her constant companion.

Print Page

“They told me they thought Jodi had been kidnapped by her dad,” Clark said. “My first reaction was a feeling of relief because I thought she was better off with her dad. They never told me that Jodi had been killed.”

Clark said Jodi’s dad is still traumatized by his daughter’s death. He lives in the South Bend area but has been considering returning to the Constantine.

Help with grief

Life has been difficult in many ways for Clark. She raised seven children. She worked in the health care field for many years. Now, painful arthritis keeps her mostly confined to her house along the St. Joseph River where she has lived for 21 years.

Ron Alson, the oldest of Clark’s seven children, has been staying with his mother as she grieves over her great-granddaughter.

“If I were the police, I would be looking for a loner who lives in this area and is a pedophile,” Alson said. “There are many such people who live between here and White Pigeon.”

Alson said Jodi had a nice smile for everyone.

“But tell me what chance would a pretty young girl have against a man with such evil on his mind?” he said. “I wouldn’t put it past this person to try doing it again.”

Special smile

There’s a Bible next to Clark’s favorite chair. It’s an old Bible that has been through a years of wear and tear. Clark reads it often, along with many other books covering everything from current events to novels. She said she finds strength reading her Bible in these times.

Jodi always enjoyed going to school. Even students at Colon Elementary School still remember her as a girl who liked to make others happy. She also kept a diary.

“I only wish that it could have been me that was killed instead of her,” Clark said.

Clark said she saw Jodi’s special smile when she was only 2, and it never changed. She smiled at strangers.

“I’ll never forget when she picked a bouquet of flowers outside and she gave them to me,” Clark said. “She was wearing that smile ...”

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Monday, December 10, 2007

It's the 'busy season' for abuse cases

Expectations of perfect holidays often ignites batterers' anger, domestic violence experts say.

Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

Police and prosecutors call it the busy season. When the holidays roll around, they see an increase in domestic violence calls and cases.

Wayne County prosecutors who handle domestic violence cases are on call during the season. In Oakland County, prosecutors said they have enough cases to keep keep them at the office daily until midnight, and Macomb County Sheriff's deputies are distributing information to victims to help them escape the cycle of violence.

"It is our busy season," said Lisa Gorcyca, chief of the Oakland County Prosecutor Office's Domestic Violence Section. "We are swamped."

In Oakland County, the Prosecutor's Office handled 1,000 felony domestic violence cases last year and will surpass that number for 2007, a first since Gorcyca founded the section in 1998. There are many more thousands of misdemeanor cases, but those are handled by the city attorneys in whichever municipality they occur, Gorcyca said.

Prosecutors in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb could not give an exact percentage of increase in cases for November and December. But they say that their caseload increases during the holidays, and they either add extra staff or schedule people to be on call.

"Around the holidays, people have expectations that things will be perfect and everything is happy, happy, happy," said Mary Jane Hood, associate director of Plymouth-based First Step. "When that does not happen, (batterers) get agitated and look for ways to feel strong. If they are unable to carry out that fantasy, then there are problems."

For example, there were four domestic violence-related homicides in Macomb County between Oct. 23 and Nov. 4, including one case in which a suspect was caught after he fled to another state.

On Nov. 10, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy announced murder charges against 28-year-old James Bruhn in the Nov. 7 slaying of a Wyandotte woman and the serious injury of his former girlfriend. His former girlfriend was living with her new boyfriend, and Worthy alleges it was the boyfriend's mother who was killed in the incident.

In another case, a Lincoln Park man has been charged with beating his girlfriend and abusing their 8-day-old daughter so badly she died Nov. 24. The child, who was living with adult relatives, was bleeding from the mouth and rectum and may have been sexually abused, police said. The Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office ruled the death a homicide.

"November and December have always been this way," Gorcyca said. "We gear up. We know it is coming. We gird ourselves."

Wayne County handles more than 7,000 such cases annually, Worthy said. Her office has 13 assistant prosecutors who focus only on domestic violence cases. That is four more than when she took office in 2004, said Piper Fakir, head of Worthy's Domestic Violence Division.

"It is almost like clockwork, sadly, that when we have holiday seasons or times of cheer, we have more and more instances of domestic violence," Worthy said.

Kalyn Risker, 35, suffered years of abuse before ending a relationship in 1998 with her former boyfriend. She said the man shattered her left eye socket during a Labor Day weekend beating, and doctors had to insert steel in her skull to help to hold it together.

Now Risker, a Detroit with two children, runs Sisters Acquiring Financial Empowerment, a nonprofit that

helps people who have escaped domestic violence find jobs or job training. She and her staff of volunteers have gone from helping about 30 people weekly to nearly 100.

"My calls have tripled," she said of women looking for help. "My phone is ringing off the hook. It definitely has to do with this time of the year."

Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel said the spate of domestic violence-related homicides in his county is a concern. He said his deputies are passing out cards with the numbers of places victims can call for help. Worthy said domestic violence can quickly turn from ugly to fatal. "It is very hard to protect citizens from the murderer they know," she said. "We have to keep talking, keep educating and keep spreading the message about domestic violence. Tragically, murder is often the ultimate act of domestic violence."

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The Daily Telegram

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MONDAY DECEMBER 10, 2007 Last modified: *Saturday, December 8, 2007 9:49 PM EST*

Looking for more room

The Lenawee County Mission seeks to expand its building to serve the increased homeless need in the county. The mission would like to acquire another location.

By [David Panian](#)

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — About a year after first trying to expand, the Lenawee County Mission again is going to try to acquire more space to meet a growing need for homeless shelter space.

Since opening about two years ago, the mission has offered both a temporary homeless shelter for men and a residential, faith-based addiction rehabilitation program at its North Broad Street location. If the house were only a homeless shelter, it could house 17 men, but it now is split about evenly between shelter space and the rehab program.

“Here recently I had to turn away 13 men in one week,” mission executive director Pastor Steven Palmer said. “There’s an increased need for shelter for men.”

Palmer took over as executive director in May after overseeing the mission’s daily operations. The mission’s founder, the Rev. Jim Watson, remains as the president of the mission’s board and is also the senior pastor at the Raisin Valley Friends Church, Palmer said.

Watson started the mission in early 2006 after learning of the number of homeless men and the amount of addiction in the Lenawee County community. He had run similar programs from rural North Carolina to San Francisco and urban Connecticut. He learned that homeless women and families in the county have some options, such as the Catherine Cobb Domestic Violence Shelter, but men largely did not have a place to stay.

Last fall the mission tried to secure funding to acquire another downtown house so that the LifeChange rehab program and the Fresh Start homeless shelter could have their own locations. Palmer said the mission would like to acquire another location by late spring.

So far 83 men have used the homeless shelter, Palmer said. Of those, the mission helped 33 with finding work and housing, 34 had a job but needed temporary housing, and 16 were asked to leave for not complying with the mission’s rules.

Those rules include a requirement that they show an effort to obtain a job or housing and that they do not come to the shelter while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Palmer said the mission has expanded its services to include instruction on computer use and job-seeking skills, including help in writing a resume.

Typically there is a 90-day limit to staying at the shelter, but the mission is flexible with that.



LENAWEE COUNTY MISSION: Residents Jeff Marbais and Aaron Stoner talk with Pastor Steven Palmer in the living room at the Lenawee County Mission earlier this week. The mission offers both a temporary homeless shelter for men and a residential, faith-based addiction rehabilitation program. — Telegram photo by [Lad Strayer](#)

“Knowing what the economy is, when the 90 days are up, we’re not opposed to extending that if the gentleman is trying” to find a job and housing, Palmer said. “We’re really adamant with Fresh Start to eradicate homelessness one man at a time rather than enable

homelessness.”

The most common reason men find themselves homeless is dysfunctional relationships, Palmer said. That could be problems with their wife or girlfriend or problems at work. He said the mission has seen an increase in teenagers coming to them after being kicked out of their homes.

Other reasons that bring men to their door include the economy, the weather and people who are between jobs or residences.

The LifeChange program has had 10 men enroll, with one completing the one-year program, Palmer said. Eight men are still in the program. The three-phase program starts with discipleship and beginning to transform their lives, then moves into finding employment and, finally, housing. The men in LifeChange also run the homeless shelter, cooking meals, doing laundry and working around the house. This year they finished painting the exterior of the house a vivid turquoise blue.

The LifeChange men come from Lenawee County, Toledo and as far away as Indiana. Palmer said the mission is part of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions, which will sometimes refer men to the mission. Usually word of mouth brings men to the mission’s door.

Palmer said the mission’s home church is the First Baptist Church in Tecumseh and the men regularly attend services there. However, he said, they also go to other churches to introduce the men to different faith communities, and those churches also help the mission in different ways.

“Even though we give a Christian witness ... we do not promote or endorse any particular denomination or construct,” Palmer said.

The mission is always open to volunteer help, Palmer said, adding that several churches have members who help with meal preparation and Bible study sessions.

“The Lenawee County Mission is a source for volunteers, especially the faith community, to make visible Jesus’ love to people who are broken and in need,” Palmer said.

While the mission’s financial footing is stable, he said financial and materials donations are also welcome.

Palmer invited anyone interested in volunteering or donating to call him at 265-4019 or send an e-mail message to LenaweeCountyMission@verizon.net. The mission’s Web site is www.lenaweecountymission.org.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--



Monday, December 10, 2007

Poverty is biggest threat to state children

Job creation, education will assure a more hopeful future

Finally, there is some good news about the state's children. Teen pregnancy is down; teen binge drinking and smoking are falling, and more toddlers are getting immunized, according to Kids Count in Michigan 2007, an in-depth analysis of family well-being.

Education efforts and the work of committed activists are paying off. But there remains work to be done, as evidenced by a deeper look at the report.

Kids Count concludes that the biggest threat to children in the state is that poverty is growing in Michigan and intensifying in Detroit, already one of the poorest big cities in the nation. That brings with it a wide range of social problems that are less prevalent in times of economic prosperity.

And there's no reason to believe an economic upturn will occur soon without better policies from the state. Michigan's poverty is up 24 percent since 2000-2001, as measured by the number of students receiving free or reduced priced school lunches, the report found. Those students' family incomes were 185 percent below poverty level.

In Detroit, the poverty rate grew by 20 percent by the same measurement. That trend is driven in part by middle-class families leaving the city.

Detroit must give those families more education options. If the exodus continues, the city will not have enough taxpayers left to cover the added costs that come with being a high poverty community.

Illiteracy is also a nagging issue. In Detroit, the illiteracy rates are similar to that of Third World countries such as Guatemala and are undermining efforts to bring jobs to the community.

Ireland, India and other countries modernized their economies through education. Like Michigan, they also faced strapped government budgets, which forced them to be more creative and resourceful.

The best way to address the high poverty rates and the threat they present to children is to focus on economic development, job creation, education reform and literacy. That's an agenda that will assure a better future for Michigan's children.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071210/OPINION01/712100336/1007/OPINION>

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published December 10, 2007



(Photo by BECKY SHINK/Lansing State Journal)

Multiple challenges: Since Barry Henderson stopped working in 2003 because of lupus, he has had multiple surgeries. Henderson, 48, of Delta Township relies on Social Security disability and food assistance, and has trouble getting by.

By the numbers

1.3M
number of Michigan residents living in poverty in 2006

51.8%

of renters pay at least 30 percent of their household income on rent and utilities

7.7%

Michigan's unemployment rate in October

50,000

number of tri-county residents seeking help at food pantries annually

Sources: Michigan League for Human Services and the Capital Area United Way

Looking for help: Poverty on rise in Michigan

Chris Andrews
Lansing State Journal

Barry Henderson never imagined the course his life would take when he accepted a job as a human resources director in Lansing six years ago.

"I was a professional person all my life, and I was making \$80,000 a year, and then I got sick," he said. "I wasn't prepared for that."

Henderson, who has lupus, has undergone multiple surgeries, is homebound and unable to work. He depends on Social Security and food assistance to get by.

He is among the growing number of Michigan residents living in poverty. A new report by the Michigan League for Human Services says that 13.3 percent of Michigan residents - or 1.3 million - were in poverty in 2006, up from 9.4 percent five years earlier.

"The Changing Face of Poverty in Michigan" report paints a bleak picture about conditions for many families in Michigan.

Among the findings:

- Families are earning less. The median household income of \$47,182 is down 7.5 percent since 2001, when adjusted for inflation. It is also below the national average of \$48,451.
- About 52 percent of Michigan renters are paying at least 30 percent of their household income on rent, including utilities. That's up 12 percent from 40 percent in 2001.
- Nearly 30,000 homes were in some stage of foreclosure in the third quarter of 2007, representing one of every 102 households. That's nearly double the national rate.
- There were 450,000 fewer Michigan residents covered by private health insurance plans in 2005-06 than in 2000-01.
- The number of working poor, not on welfare, receiving food assistance more than doubled between fiscal 2001 and fiscal 2006.

"There is a lot of dislocation going on, and we have increasing numbers of families who are falling into hard times," said Sharon Parks, vice president of the league. "They are depending on a social safety net that is severely strained."

Henderson, 48, can attest to that. He said he had to fight the Department of Human Services bureaucracy for more than two years to get food assistance.

He said he still is not receiving all to which he is entitled but can't get the DHS to help him fill out forms - a problem because he has very poor vision. And he believes his complaints will bring reprisals.

"I have to make choices between paying the co-pay on my prescriptions, which means not getting the prescriptions, or getting food," he said. "It really does come down to that."

Social services agencies report growing demand for help on a variety of fronts.

"We're getting a lot of calls for assistance around rent and utilities and those kinds of issues, said Mike Brown, executive director of the Capital Area United Way. "Foreclosures is another issue that has really grown in the last six months."

Brown said about 50,000 tri-county residents have sought help from food pantries in the past year.

Parks of the League for Human Services said that's in part because of the loss of the good-paying jobs to which the state has been accustomed in the past. "As our economy has changed we have more and more people working in jobs that pay very low wages," she said.

Contact Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or candrews@lsj.com.



Less publicized group faces challenges

Sunday, December 09, 2007

By Christina Hildreth

Mary Schumacher isn't interested in playing the victim. She'll accept cards and well-wishes but doesn't want your pity.

Stage-three breast cancer threatens her life, chemotherapy depletes her strength, and she is \$27,000 in debt after her first treatment cycle. If she beats the cancer, she expects to owe up to \$100,000.

"I'm not after money, I'm after awareness," said Schumacher, of Brooklyn, her bald head wrapped in a bright pink scarf. "If this is happening to me, it's happening to people less fortunate than me."

While millions of Americans are without health insurance, Schumacher of Brooklyn is part of a less publicized group whose plight can be nearly as catastrophic -- the underinsured.

"Being underinsured isn't all that different from being uninsured," said Karen Pollitz, a professor at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute. "It's a slightly slower trip to the poor house."

A fiery grandmother, Schumacher, 63, is on two crusades. One is to survive, the other is to change a system that she believes preys upon honest, middle-income Americans.

About 40 percent of Americans don't have employer-based health insurance, the Kaiser Family Foundation reports, and 47 million are uninsured. About 5 percent of Jackson County residents purchased their own insurance between 2001 and 2003, the latest figures available, according to the 2007 Jackson County Community Report Card.

Facing reality

Insurance companies say they do everything they can to craft individual policies that are both affordable and adequate.

"We are always looking for products and solutions to help people," said Rob Guilbert, corporate communications vice president for Assurant Health, the Milwaukee-based insurance company that issued Schumacher's policy. "We are truly committed to getting coverage for the 47 million Americans without health coverage."

But it's impossible to buy good health insurance on an average income without employer or government subsidies, said Pollitz, who researches private insurance markets.

"They sell policies at a price that people feel like they can afford -- something that looks like a car payment as opposed to a mortgage payment," she said.

"The problem is, good health insurance is not cheap."

Schumacher, who bought her policy over the phone through a Georgia-based independent agent, has learned that the hard way.

Doctors diagnosed her with cancer in June, a few weeks after she discovered a lump in her left breast. Surgeons performed a mastectomy on July 10, removing the breast and 16 lymph nodes, 11 of which were cancerous. She faced weeks of chemotherapy and possible radiation.

After surgery, Schumacher called Milwaukee-based Assurant to see about payment. She was shocked.

Her policy didn't fully cover many of her procedures. Her out-of-pocket costs were already thousands of dollars.

`A nice little policy'

A self-employed hairdresser, Schumacher went uninsured for 10 years following a divorce. Entering her 60s, she said she had been healthy most of her life -- never smoked, didn't drink and took frequent long walks. Her only extended hospital stay was for thyroid surgery in her 20s.

She had considered riding on luck until she turned 65 and became eligible for Medicare. Her monthly income is \$1,400 -- from Social Security and a small pension from her years working at General Motors. It's enough to make ends meet, but not enough to buy a comprehensive insurance policy.

At age 61, she gave in to pleas from her family and started shopping for individual health-care coverage.

A nephew first gave her information on Assurant. The brochure detailed a plan that annually provided \$250,000 for major medical, \$250,000 for prescriptions and \$10,000 for outpatient services -- all for a premium of \$210 per month.

"I thought it sounded like a nice little policy," said Schumacher. "I thought anything major would be under the \$250,000 major medical. I thought I was a pretty sharp woman."

What Schumacher didn't know is that 60 percent to 70 percent of all medical costs are now outpatient, including anything from dialysis to physical therapy to, in her case, chemotherapy.

"She's more stressed out over this insurance company than she is with the cancer," said Schumacher's older sister, Jeanette Koziol.

Pollitz said plans like Schumacher's are common, and can have devastating results.

"There goes her nest egg," Pollitz said.

Pollitz, herself a cancer survivor, studies the regulation of private health-insurance plans and markets. She said half of personal bankruptcies in the United States are due to medical debt, and the vast majority of those are filed by people who have some form of private health insurance.

The average amount of medical debt that bankrupts families is less than \$14,000.

"People get slammed all the time. It's a safe bet that many, if not most, of the people in the (non-employer-based) market are underinsured," Pollitz said. "But they get away with it because they are healthy and don't need to use their health insurance."

Mounting debts

It isn't that all insurance companies are out to ravage the American people, said Pollitz. Insurers, desperate to avoid bad risks, will do anything they can to craft an "affordable" policy. That usually means turning down the already sick and designing policies that won't pay very much on claims, she said.

Assurant has made some exceptions for cancer patients. Policy-holders who are diagnosed with cancer are eligible for an additional \$25,000 each year in outpatient coverage.

But the benefit is not automatic -- Schumacher talked with 14 different customer service representatives and filed a complaint with the state of Michigan before she received it. Even then, only portions of certain services are covered.

Schumacher's plan illustrates Pollitz's point. Within her stack of medical bills are many for which Assurant has paid 50 percent or less.

When surgeons inserted a port into Schumacher's chest to ease application of chemotherapy, Assurant paid for part of the surgery, but would not pay for the surgeon's assistant.

The policy has even affected some choices her doctor has made. Bixby Medical Center in Adrian is only 30

minutes from Brooklyn and offers chemotherapy services at its Hickman Cancer Center. But once every two weeks Schumacher drives more than twice as long to Flower Hospital in Sylvania, Ohio, where her doctor also practices, for treatment. He told Schumacher the Toledo-area hospital can better afford not to receive payment. Both hospitals are owned by ProMedica Health System.

Her doctor does not practice at Foote Hospital, so receiving treatment there was not an option, she said.

Since Schumacher bought her policy in 2005, Assurant has hiked her premiums five times. She now pays \$433.11 a month, more than double the original cost.

Since 2005, Schumacher has paid the company \$7,613 in premiums. By her calculations, Assurant has agreed to pay \$20,117 for chemotherapy-related treatments. Schumacher owes \$27,166.

Raising her voice

Schumacher has taken her story to lawmakers, calling the offices of state and national representatives.

She wants policies like hers to be illegal, and wants insurance companies to be more up-front about what they're selling. New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maine and Vermont rigorously regulate private individual insurance, and she's fighting to make that happen in Michigan, too.

State Rep. Mike Simpson, D-Liberty Township, came to listen to her.

"For an insurance company to do to Mary what it's doing to Mary, in my mind that's nothing short of criminal," he said.

Simpson lost a teenage daughter to cancer in 1994. At the time, Simpson owned a small advertising agency and was self-employed. Though he had purchased insurance, medical bills swamped the family's finances. Since being elected last year, he has campaigned for health-insurance reform.

Simpson said his first priority is to help Schumacher receive public assistance with her medical bills. She is in a strange spot financially, he said, having too high an income to qualify for most assistance programs but not having enough to cover her enormous medical debt.

Simpson and political allies in the House recently passed reforms to allow nonprofit insurance companies such as Blue Cross Blue Shield to compete in the open market, ultimately forcing all insurance companies to decrease costs to the consumer, he said. The legislation, which is opposed by Attorney General Mike Cox, now is before a Senate committee, though significant action probably won't occur until next year.

Cox said the bills put Blue Cross Blue Shield's profits ahead of the people it serves.

Simpson pledged to work with the House's Health Policy, Insurance and Judiciary committees to pass legislation that will prevent situations like Schumacher's.

"Once we get Mary on track, then we are going to go after the people that sell these policies with a vengeance," he said.

Ongoing crusade

In the midst of her political and financial battles, Schumacher is not giving in.

When she can afford it, she pays off the smaller bills in full. She sends \$25 each month to each of the creditors who hold larger tabs, to let them know she is doing what she can.

"They are just going to have to take payments," she said.

She keeps a positive attitude, posting cards and letters from family and friends all over her living room. She relies on older sister Koziol for support.

"This girl has called me every day," Schumacher said through tears. "This woman, since June, she's not only been a loving sister, but she's been my best friend."

Statistically, Schumacher has two to five years left to live, and a one-in-two chance of dying from cancer.

She said she's not afraid to die, but hopes God will grant her a bit more time so she can watch her grandchildren grow up.

In the meantime, she continues her crusade.

“Tim Walberg, I want to meet him. I want to talk to Jennifer Granholm. I want to talk to people that can do something,” she said of the U.S. congressman and Michigan's governor. “America, come on, wake up. How many years before we fix health care?”

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Food pantries try meet swelling need for help

By CHERYLL WARREN Argus-Press Staff Writer
Saturday, December 8, 2007 9:36 PM EST

The number of people asking for food at local food pantries is growing.

Volunteers agree donations to area food pantries seem to be up - which they say is normal in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

Food pantry organizers, however, say that once the holiday spirit wanes, donations of food do the same thing - while the need for items that food pantries supply is increasing.

"On the average this year, we have been feeding about 130 people a month. That's a lot," said Terry Adams of Byron, who has been with Loaves and Fishes, now located in the United Methodist Church in Vernon, for about five or six years. "Lately, however, we've been helping about 180 people a month. I'm speechless.

"We bring in food, and it goes out the door," she added. "The cost of everything is going up. It's no wonder people are struggling."

The total number of people helped by Loaves and Fishes in 2006 was 1,180, and for 2007, 1,427 have been fed so far, with December figures :

Adams said donations are starting to come in for the holidays, and that is helping restock their shelves.

"We get very empty a lot, especially during the summer," she said.

Adams sees the need growing in more ways than just numbers.

"Since this fall, we've had a few homeless people come in for food," said Adams. "There is no shelter in Shiawassee County to help them. One van, and going to the park to grill their meals."

At the American Red Cross Shiawassee Service Center, the food pantry was closed for nearly two weeks this fall because the shelves were empty.

"We served 126 families from July until September this year, 32 more families than we served in the same quarter last year," said Carrie Hudec with the Red Cross.

The Salvation Army is also seeing an increased number of people in need of food.

"There is a greater need now than a year ago," said Janice Hathon, intake specialist for the Owosso Citadel. "Our food requests have slowly increased and we're not getting the food coming in like we have in the past."

Connie Austin, administrative assistant at Corunna United Methodist Church, which operates a food pantry for the Corunna Ministerial Association, said there is an increase in need.

Austin said in 2006, the pantry helped just under 900 people. Pantry volunteers expect to help many more than that this year.

Donations drop off after Christmas until about Easter, she added, when some donations start coming in again.

Shirley Shaw, a volunteer who works with Perry, Morrice, Shaftsbury Emergency Relief, operating out of Perry City Hall, said pantry volunteers have distributed more than 100 Christmas boxes this year, an increase over last year.

"The need is just tremendous," she said, "not only in our food banks locally, but everywhere in the state of Michigan."

Food pantry volunteers see rising costs and a tough economic climate as factors leading to rising requests for food.

"It's going to get worse before it gets better," said Hathon, of the Salvation Army.



Argus-Press Photo
Barbara Williams
basket of food
Fishes food pantry

Salvation Army kettle campaign struggling

Posted by [Liz Cobbs | The Ann Arbor News](#) December 10, 2007 07:51AM



LEISA THOMPSON/THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Beth Dugan of Ann Arbor holds her son Foster as he puts money in the Salvation Army container outside the Macy's department store at Briarwood Mall. Behind them, is volunteer Barbara Brabant of the Tri-County Two-Cylinder Club.

As of Friday, the local campaign collected \$105,119 - a 21 percent drop from the same time a year ago, according to Salvation Army figures.

By LIZ COBBS

The Ann Arbor News

Sam and Barbara Brabant have been ringing bells for [The Salvation Army](#) "Red Kettle" drive every first Friday in December for the past 10 years.

The Augusta Township couple stood outside the main entrance of [Macy's](#) at the [Briarwood Mall](#) last Friday greeting customers, wishing them a "Merry Christmas" and thanking them for their donations.

"This has been a good day," Barbara Brabant said a few minutes before her two-hour shift was over. "It hasn't been that cold. Usually I have my hand-warmers and toe-warmers."

The Brabants were among 13 members of the Tri-County Two-Cylinder Club of Michigan who took turns ringing bells for 12 hours.

"I wish I could get more organizations to volunteer," said Sam Brabant, who organized the effort for his club, a group that preserves and restores antique agricultural tractors, particularly John Deere two-cylinder models.

"If we don't get volunteers, (the Salvation Army) will have to pay for bellringers. This is not good, especially when donations are going down and the case load is going up."

The Salvation Army kettle campaign is struggling to keep up last year's pace.

As of Friday, the local campaign collected \$105,119 - a 21 percent drop from the same time a year ago, according to Salvation Army figures.

The 2007 Christmas fundraising goal is \$300,00, up from \$275,000 in 2006. In addition to the kettle campaign, the Christmas fundraiser includes direct mail and other calls for support.

Capt. Ralph Labbee Jr., who heads The Salvation Army of Washtenaw County, said the overall Christmas campaign funds 40 percent of the organization's \$2.1 million annual budget.

Money raised through donations from Washtenaw County residents and businesses supports such Salvation Army programs as The Veteran's Haven of Hope and the Staples Family Center, both homeless shelters. During the holiday season, the Salvation Army distributes food, gift, clothing and other items. Last year The Salvation Army helped more than 500 families.

The Salvation Army could also use at least 200 more volunteer bellringers to staff the 40 sites across Washtenaw County for 12 hours a day, said campaignscq coordinator, Jane Talcott. To supplement the volunteer bellringers, there are about 40 paid bellringers, comparable to the number of paid bellringers last year.

Bellringers are paid starting at minimum wage and have opportunities for bonuses, Talcott said.

"My goal is to have all volunteer bellringers," Talcott said. "People don't realize how badly we need volunteers."

When it's time for the Tri-County Two-Cylinder Club to ring the bells, Sam Brabant sends e-mail and calls his members to make sure they show up. "The last thing you want to have happen is for them to miss their shift," he said.

Liz Cobbs can be reached at lcobbs@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6810.

More families seek help to stuff kids' stockings

By Scott Atkinson Argus-Press Staff Writer
Saturday, December 8, 2007 9:36 PM EST

Gerald Alcorn, coordinator of Toys for Tots with the Herald R. Cooley detachment for the Marine Corps League, needs toys.

Or, rather, children across Shiawassee County need toys.

Alcorn said that although Toys for Tots is doing "fine" overall in comparison to years past, he has seen an increase in the need for his organization, a trend other organizations are experiencing.

Alcorn estimated that he's been receiving 20 percent more phone calls this year than in 2006.

"Certainly the need is up in this county, as it is in the entire state," he said.

Alcorn isn't alone.

Matthew Rowland, director of The Salvation Army's Eastern Michigan Division, said the donations he's received are actually higher than last year. The need for those donations is keeping pace with that increase.

"It is above what it was last year, but we still get worried," he said, adding he was still glad to see an increase.

Rowland said the biggest demand is for toys and house utilities. He added this year more than 800 families are coming to The Salvation Army's event this year, the number was closer to 600 families.

The Shiawassee Goodfellows, who provide clothing for children in need, have reached \$7,000 of their \$10,000 goal, which treasurer Rick Church said this time (of year)...but we're just going to keep working at it 'til we get there."

Church said between Corunna, Owosso and Laingsburg schools, they have about 410 children they plan to help, about 50 to 100 more than last year. He wasn't sure if that was because of an increase in need in the area, or from better reporting by the schools.

Shiawassee United Way Director Sheila Shegos said the donations she's received are "a little low," but not unusually so.

"Anything can happen," she said, "I feel like we're doing great in terms of the economy."

Shegos said there was "absolutely" an increase in demand for the United Way this year, though she could not report the exact number.

"I just know our phones are ringing more," she said.

According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, the number of public charities in Michigan in 2006 was 28,238 - a 69.1 percent increase over 2000.

Some people, such as Alcorn's niece, nine year-old Abigail Alcorn, are taking the initiative.

Abigail and two of her friends, Cheyann Jackson and MaryJo Princinski, both also nine, came up with an idea and started the first Toys for Tots event. In October the girls organized a karaoke party and raised \$72 for Toys for Tots. They provided food and drink for the 30 people who attended and donated the money.

Shegos said that with any charity there is always a higher demand than can be supplied, but she remains optimistic.

"People are still giving. The community is still strong," she said. "It is rare that I hear of a problem where I don't hear of organizations moving forward to help."



Matthew Rowland
of the Greater
Army, sorts through
donations.

Locals answer call for winter clothes

By Lindsay VanHulle

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December 8, 2007

— TRAVERSE CITY -- Carol Rose knew she needed help when she saw the supplies of children's winter clothing run low at the Women's Resource Center Thrift Shop in Traverse City.

She had no idea how much help was on the way.

Since Rose contacted the Record-Eagle and other media outlets, who reported the need this week, the store has been deluged with donated clothing -- coats, snow pants, hats, gloves and boots, all in different colors and sizes.

"I give away 10 coats, and 15 more come in," said Rose, the thrift shop's manager. "There shouldn't be anybody without a coat in Traverse City this year."

The store early this week faced a shortage of warm outdoor apparel for children. There was one rack of winter coats, with a handful of snow pants on it, and only four pairs of child-sized gloves on the sales floor.

Employees since have spent hours sorting and hanging items in the store's receiving area. Two full racks and several heaping piles of coats were arranged there Thursday.

An artificial tree is assembled on the sales floor, with new hats and pairs of gloves hanging from its branches. Boots are arranged underneath. To the side is a rack of new coats, and three bins stuffed with hats and gloves sit below that.

Used items went out to the sales floor, filling in the open spaces. One boy brought in a bag containing hats and gloves, Rose said, adding that his father told her the boy had gone through his drawers after hearing about the clothing shortage.

"This really took me by surprise," Rose said. "The need was bigger this year."

The children's clothing is available for free to those who need it.

Between Wednesday and Thursday, the store had served about 200 children, Rose said.

Sheri Trigaud's two sons, ages 8 and 12, were able to get all the winter clothing they needed as a result of the community's donations.

Trigaud, of Traverse City, became homeless about 10 months ago and said she had been spending her money on food instead of clothing. She initially worried the supplies would be low at the thrift store, but soon learned that wasn't the case.

Her oldest son was more than happy with the selection.

"This is perfect, Mom," Trigaud said he told her. "This is perfect."



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State Rep. Rick Jones
is a Grand Ledge Republican.

State Rep. Rick Jones: Opposing State Police building will benefit taxpayers

Cozy lease deal is indefensible when needs are unmet

The LSJ's Dec. 3 editorial stated that legislative opposition to the Michigan State Police project in downtown Lansing won't benefit taxpayers. It also stated that squabbling over the contract will harm Michigan's business reputation and that the Legislature should have opposed the project sooner.

The project is being built in the wrong place and at the wrong time! The taxpayers of Michigan and State Police officers have contacted me in overwhelming numbers and asked for opposition. The taxpayers want the project stopped and to make sure this type of thing never happens again!

The business reputation of Michigan will be improved if in the future all projects go through the State Building Authority and get competitive bids from all developers. Financing a building with tax-exempt bonds would be a more frugal way to do business. That is the proper way to do business; not to choose a cozy group of developers to build and lease back to the state at great profit.

Other developers have contacted me and said they would have liked to bid on the project.

The developer who owns the Hart MSP Post has had his contract ended. The troopers were moved across the street to a double-wide trailer and the owner of the building was told the state could not afford the lease.

The MSP headquarters project has a similar lease agreement that says if at any time the Legislature does not appropriate money for rent, the lease will be terminated.

I opposed the project from the minute I found out about the deal. Sen. Cameron Brown, R-Sturgis, and I are working on legislation to make sure this kind of cozy sweetheart deal does not happen again. This is the wrong way to spend taxpayer money.

Recently, a young woman contacted me and advised that she had been the victim of a sexual assault. She was told by the prosecutor that her case would be prosecuted as soon as DNA evidence comes back from the crime lab.

In the meantime her assailant is free to walk the streets. She has been told that because the state is closing crime labs, that it will take at least six months for results. She asked why a rapist is walking free, and yet there are millions of dollars for a new MSP headquarters lease? Where are our funding priorities?

The MSP HQ is about more than just the wrong place and the wrong time: It is a poor use of tax dollars that affects real people.

As long as I am serving in Lansing I will continue to work with Sen. Brown to shine the light on this backroom deal and all future boondoggles. The taxpayers of Michigan deserve better treatment!

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Monday's letters to the editor

MSP deal stinks

Published December 10, 2007

From Lansing State Journal

The Michigan State Police have desired to build a new headquarters for more than 30 years.

During my 10-year administration as MSP director, I had an artist's concept of a new headquarters building - to be built at the state secondary complex - hanging in my outer office. This issue was discussed many times and the city of Lansing was never considered a viable location. The new site is unacceptable.

The two governors I served supported the building of a new headquarters, but never felt that it was fiscally responsible at the time. I supported their good judgment in doing what was best for the people.

I don't know if this piece of property, in a flood plain, has attracted so little interest in the commercial community that it must be pawned off on the state. But, I do know this deal has a bad odor.

Gerald L. Hough
Lansing